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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/24/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SP](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FIRED FOR
OBTAINING SPANISH CITIZENSHIP

Classified By: Polcouns Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(SBU) 1. On December 22, King Mohammed VI dismissed Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ahmed Lakhrif after it came to light that Lakhrif recently obtained Spanish citizenship. A press release from the MFA pointed out that dual citizenship was incompatible with Lakhrif's position as a senior official. Lakhrif, a native Sahrawi, became a Spanish citizen as a result of a program, launched in response to a court decision in early 2008, to offer citizenship to Sahrawis who lived previously under Spanish rule. It is unclear whether the decision extends to those beyond the disputed territory. Unidentified other officials of Sahrawi origin were reported also to have gained Spanish passports.

12. (C) Comment: Lakhrif is an Istiqlal party hack from Samara and Laayoune, never a diplomat. He was decidedly unimpressive when he met Poloffs in the Laayoune City Hall, prior to his appointment and never exceeded those expectations. He apparently was awarded the post as payoff to the Ould er-Rachid family's formidable Sahara Istiqlal party machine, when it delivered a pivotal number of seats in the 2007 Parliamentary election, enough to make the Istiqlal the largest party in Parliament and so gain the Premiership for Abbas el-Fassi.

13. (C) Comment continued: As one of two Secretaries of State within MFA, Lakhrif had the rank equivalent of a Junior or First Deputy Minister. Although the MFA release praised his performance, he was considered to be a non-player, at best, and given more honorific than substantive responsibilities. For a time, Lakhrif's principal job was standing in for the Minister at Arab League or other Arab group events, which became a liability as the Minister began to be more personally involved in League activities. Lakhrif remains for now a member of the Royal Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), which meets December 25 and 26, and of the Istiqlal Party. It is not now clear who else might be tainted by the Spanish brush. CORCAS head Kalihenna himself might be one. There may also be some impact on Istiqlal, particularly if Lakhrif loses his seat in Parliament. End comment.

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